

# Dr. Ambedkar with the Simon Commission

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**STATEMENT "E"**  
**NOTE BY Dr. B. R. AMBEDKAR TO**  
**THE INDIAN FRANCHISE COMMITTEE**  
(LOTHIAN COMMITTEE)  
**ON THE DEPRESSED CLASSES**  
**SUBMITTED ON 1st MAY 1932**

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## **I. General**

1. I have agreed to confine the term depressed classes to untouchables only. In fact, I have myself sought to exclude from the untouchables all those in whom there cannot be the same consciousness of kind as is shared by those who suffer from the social discrimination that is inherent in the system of untouchability and who are therefore likely to exploit the untouchables for their own purposes. I have also raised no objection to the utilisation of tests 7 and 8 referred to in the Committee's report for the ascertainment of the untouchable classes. But as I find that different persons seek to apply them in different ways, or put different constructions on them I feel it necessary to explain my point of view in regard to this matter.
2. In the first place it is urged in some quarters that whatever tests are applied for ascertaining the untouchable classes they must be applied uniformly all over India. In this connection, I desire to point out that in a matter of this sort it would hardly be appropriate to apply the same test or tests all over India. India is not a single homogeneous country. It is a continent. The various Provinces are marked by extreme diversity of conditions and there is no tie of race or language. Owing to absence of communication each Province has evolved along its own lines with its Own peculiar manners and modes of social life. In such circumstances the degree of uniformity with which most of the tests of untouchability are found to apply all over India is indeed remarkable. For instance, bar against temple entry exists everywhere in India. Even the tests of well-water and pollution by touch apply in every Province, although not with the same rigidity everywhere. But to insist on absolute uniformity in a system like that of untouchability which after all is a matter of social

behaviour and which must therefore vary with the circumstances of each Province and also of each individual is simply to trifle with the problem. The Statutory Commission was quite alive to this possible line of argument and after careful consideration rejected it by recognizing the principle of diversity in the application of tests of untouchability. On page 67 of Vol. II which contains its recommendations it observed : "It will plainly be necessary, after the main principles of the new system of representation have been settled, to entrust to some specially appointed body (like the former Franchise Committee) the task of drawing up fresh electoral rules to carry these principles into effect, and one of the tasks of such a body will be to frame for each province a definition of ' depressed classes ' (which may well vary, sometimes even between parts of the same province), and to determine their numbers as so defined." Another point which I wish to emphasize is the futility of insisting upon the application of uniform tests of untouchability all over India. It is a fundamental mistake to suppose that differences in tests of untouchability indicate differences in the conditions of the untouchables. On a correct analysis of the mental attitude they indicate, it will be found that whether the test is causing pollution by touch or refusal to use common well, the notion underlying both is one and the same. Both are outward registers of the same inward feeling of defilement, odium, aversion and contempt. Why will not a Hindu touch an untouchable ? Why will not a Hindu allow an untouchable to enter the temple or use the village well ? Why will not a Hindu admit an untouchable in the inn ? The answer to each one of these questions is the same. It is that the untouchable is an unclean person not fit for social intercourse. Again, why will not a Brahmin priest officiate at religious ceremonies performed by an untouchable ? Why will not a barber serve an untouchable ? In these cases also the answer is the same. It is that it is below dignity to do so. If our aim is to demarcate the class of people who suffer from social odium then it matters very little which test we apply. For as I have pointed out each of these tests is indicative of the same social attitude on the part of the touchables towards the untouchables.

3. In the second place the view is put forth that in applying the test of " causing pollution by touch " for ascertaining the untouchable classes effect must be given to it in its literal sense—and not in its notional sense. In the literal sense untouchables are only those persons whose touch not only causes pollution and is therefore avoided, or if not avoided is washed off by purification. In the notional sense an untouchable is a person who is deemed to belong to a class which is commonly held to

cause pollution by touch, although contact with such a person may for local circumstances not be avoided or may not necessitate ceremonial purification. According to those who seek to apply the test in its literal sense the conclusion would be the so-called untouchables should cease to be reckoned as untouchables wherever conditions have so changed that people do not avoid the touch of an untouchable, or do not trouble to purify themselves of the pollution caused by their touch. I cannot accept this view which, in my opinion, is based on a misconception. An individual may not be treated as an untouchable in the literal sense of the term on account of various circumstances. None the less outside the scope of such compelling circumstances he does continue to be regarded as an impure person by reason of his belonging to the untouchable class. This distinction is well brought out by the Census Superintendent of Bihar and Orissa in his Census Report of 1921 from which the following is an extract. Speaking of the relaxation of caste rules he says : " Such incidents however which we have only noticed amongst the upper and more educated castes that are aspiring to the upper ranks, are to be regarded not as sign portending the collapse of the caste system, but of its adjustment to modern conditions. The same may be said with regard to modifications of the rules about personal contact or the touching of what is eaten or drunk.... In places like Jamshedpur where work is done under modern conditions men of all castes and races work side by side in the mill without any misgivings regarding the caste of their neighbours. But, because the facts of everyday life make it impossible to follow the same practical rules as were followed a hundred years ago, it is not to be supposed that the distinctions of pure and impure, touchable and untouchable are no longer observed. A high caste Hindu will not allow an ' untouchable ' to sit on the same seat, to smoke the same hookah or to touch his person, his seat, his food or the water that he drinks." If this is a correct statement of the facts of life then the difference between untouchability in its literal and notional sense is a distinction which makes no difference to the ultimate situation; for as the extract shows untouchability in its notional sense persists even where untouchability in its literal sense has ceased to obtain. This is why I insist that the test of untouchability must be applied in its notional sense.

4. In the third place the idea is broadcast that untouchability is rapidly vanishing. I wish to utter a word of caution against the acceptance of this view, and to point out the necessity of distinguishing facts from propaganda. In my opinion what is important to be borne in mind in drawing inference from instances showing the occasional commingling of

Brahmins and non-Brahmins, touchables and untouchables is that the system of caste and the system of untouchability form really the steel frame of Hindu society. This division cannot easily be wiped out for the simple reason that it is not based upon rational, economic or racial grounds. On the other hand, the chances are that untouchability will endure far longer into the future than the optimist reformer is likely to admit on account of the fact that it is based on religious dogma. What makes it so difficult, to break the system of untouchability is the religious sanction which it has behind it. At any rate the ordinary Hindu looks upon it as part of his religion and there is no doubt that in adopting towards untouchables in what is deemed to be an inhuman way of behaviour he does so more from the sense of observing his religion than from any motive of deliberate cruelty. Based on religion the ordinary Hindu only relaxes the rules of untouchability where he cannot observe them. He never abandons them. For abandonment of untouchability to him involves a total abandonment of the basic religious tenets of Hinduism as understood by him and the mass of Hindus. Based on religion untouchability will persist as all religious notions have done. Indian history records the attempts of many a Mahatma to uproot untouchability from the Indian soil. They include such great men as Buddha, Ramanuja and the Vaishnava saints of modern times. It would be hazardous to assume that a system which has withstood all this onslaught will collapse. The Hindu looks upon the observance of untouchability as an act of religious merit, and non-observance of it as sin. My view therefore is that so long as this notion prevails untouchability will prevail.

Having explained my views on general questions regarding interpretations and connotations of the system of untouchability, I proceed to offer some remarks on the question of the population of depressed classes in the three Provinces in which there is no unanimity of opinion.

## **II. Depressed Classes in United Provinces**

5. Regarding the population of the depressed classes in the United Provinces five different estimates have been given to the Committee —
  - (1) estimate of the United Provinces Provincial Franchise Committee;
  - (2) estimate given by Mr. Blunt in his note;
  - (3) estimate given by the Census Commissioner;
  - (4) two estimates given by the Government of the United Provinces. I make the following observations on these estimates :
6. I agree that Mr. Blunt's note carries great authority with it. It is based on the facts which came into his possession as a Census Superintendent for United Provinces in 1911. It has the added weight of the opinion of

an informal Committee of non-official Hindus which I am told was appointed by the United Provinces Government to examine the correctness of the lists of untouchable castes in United Provinces drawn up by Mr. Blunt in his first draft. All the same I differ from Mr. Blunt in the following particulars:

(i) One is that Mr. Blunt has divided the three following single communities into two dichotomous sections, one touchable and the other untouchable:

		Touchable	Untouchable
1	Bhoksa group	30,000	19,028
2	Kori group	154,867	775,839
3	Chamar group	2,000,000	4,187,770

(ii) The second point of difference is that he treats the Arakh group whose population is 110,032 as touchable when as a matter of fact that group forms a part of the Pasi community which is undoubtedly an untouchable community.

My contention is that the procedure adopted by Mr. Blunt *is* not in accordance with facts and is not warranted by the fundamental theory of Hindu social life. That the Kori group is simply a part of the Chamar group and as such is wholly an untouchable group is borne out by the views of Mr. Blunt himself as expressed by him in the report of the United Provinces Census of 1911 of which he was the Superintendent. I rely on the remarks made by him in paragraph 347 of the Census Report of 1911 where he has discussed the connection of the Kori to the Chamar. On the same Report he makes the following observations :

" The relation between Kori and Chamar has already been referred to above. In Gorakhpur it appears to be closer still and it is said that there are no Koris there save Kori Chamars. The Kori Chamar however drops the Chamar and tries to pass himself off as a Kori pure and simple, or even by slurring the word to make it sound like Koiri. A Khalasi in Gorakhpur district was severely beaten by the rest of his Hindu fellow servants for playing this trick and making them take water from his hands."

Regarding the Arakh group Mr. Blunt himself admits in his note that " as a whole these castes appear to be off-shoots of the important Pasi tribe " which he has treated as untouchable. Coming to the Chamar group Mr. Blunt's reasons for excluding 2 million Chamars from the category of untouchables are given by him on page 17 of his note. He says : " Oh the other hand many Chamars have taken to cleaner occupations such as those

of saddler (zingar), cobbler (mochi), groom (syce), while the extension of the leather trade at Cawnpore and elsewhere has enabled many Chamars to become wealthy when they aim at social status much higher than that of their village brethren. Such Chamars are generally regarded as touchables and many change the caste name for something less ill-sounding, for instance, Koril, Aharwar, Jatiya, Dhusiya and especially Jaiswar." In my opinion to exclude, as Mr. Blunt has done, such Chamars as have taken to cleaner occupations or have become wealthy from the category of untouchables is a totally erroneous view. One of the characteristics of the system of untouchability and also of the caste system is that the social status of the individual rises or falls with that of the community to which he belongs. Once an untouchable always an untouchable has been the rule of Hindu social life. This is its cardinal feature and it is this which distinguishes it from the class system in which the social status of the individual rises or falls not with that of the community to which he belongs but with his own personal merits and demerits. Having regard to this fundamental and basic principle of Hindu social life, the division made by Mr. Blunt that some members of an admittedly untouchable caste are touchable must be discarded. Indeed it is a contradiction in terms and does not seem to be in accord with the facts. It is not true that sections of the Chamar caste mentioned by Mr. Blunt have been treated as touchable or allowed to enter temples or draw water from public wells. On the contrary, they have invented, according to Mr. Blunt's own statement, new names for themselves to avoid being treated as untouchables, Mr. Blunt himself gives instances of this in his Census Report for the United Provinces for 1911. I quote the following extract from Part I :

" A Jaiswar Chamar in the same way will never admit he is a Chamar but tries to pass his caste off as Jaiswar alone, a sub-caste of so many castes including Rajput. A syce once tried the trick on me and in Tundla in Agra district. I found a whole colony of Jaiswars who on enquiry proved to be descendants of Chamar regimental syces who had settled there."

If my contentions are accepted and if that part of the population of the untouchable communities which Mr. Blunt has treated as touchable is added to the total of untouchables then Mr. Blunt's figures for untouchables in the United Provinces come to 11,476,214.

7. The Census Commissioner's estimate of the population of the depressed classes is 12-6 millions, and even if a stricter computation was followed and only 'list A' which includes untouchables only was accepted the population of depressed classes so understood would come up to a little over 11 millions—a figure which very nearly agrees

with that of Mr. Blunt.

8. The Government of the United Provinces has given two sets of estimates. In its first report it gave the figure of 6,773,814. In its final report it agreed with the Provincial Committee that the population of castes which fell within the definition of causing pollution by touch came to only 459,000. Regarding the estimate of 6,773,814 given in its first report it is necessary to point out that this estimate is not an estimate of the population of untouchables in the United Provinces. So far as that point is concerned the Government of the United Provinces seem tacitly to accept the figures given by Mr. Blunt in his Note. The estimate of 6,773,814 given by the U. P. Government is an estimate of people who in its opinion require to be recognised for political protection. The merits of this procedure I have discussed below. All that I wish to do here is to repeat that this estimate of the U. P. Government is not an estimate of the total population of untouchables as such. The only comment I wish to make on the estimate given by the United Provinces Government in its final report is to place beside it the estimate which it gave to the Simon Commission. In their note on the position of the depressed classes which is printed as an addendum at the end of their memorandum to the Statutory Commission they said: " Of the total Hindu population of the province nearly one-third, that is almost thirteen millions are regarded by orthodox Hindus as untouchables. A list of castes classed as untouchable, extracted from the U. P. Census Report of 1901, with the population of each is appended to this note.....  
*The social impurity attaching to the untouchable castes merely implies that a man of high caste will not take food or water from an untouchable, and if he touches or comes in close contact with such a person he must wash before eating or even before mixing with persons of higher castes.*" It is clear from this that on the 16th of May 1928, on which the memorandum was submitted, the population of persons who on the basis of untouchability as meaning causing pollution of touch was 13 millions. It is obvious that the definition given by the Chairman of our Committee is not different from the definition which obtained in U.P. and which is followed by the Government in 1928 in computing this total of 13 millions. I must therefore leave the United Provinces Government to explain the vast difference between the two estimates. I am, however, constrained to remark that these changes in the estimates of the untouchables in the United Provinces by the United II Provinces Government are equalled by the changes in the views of the United Provinces Government regarding the method of representation

of the depressed classes. In their despatch on the report of the Statutory Commission written on 23rd August 1930 the Government of the United Provinces was the staunchest supporter of separate electorates for the depressed classes. In their first report to our Committee the Government came down to nomination from a panel while in their final report it recommended reservation of seats. It would be a disaster to the cause of the depressed classes if the views of a Government were to undergo such strange oscillations in regard to two such momentous issues as the population and representation of the depressed classes.

9. Coming to the estimate given by the United Provinces Provincial Franchise Committee I wish to draw attention to the following facts :
  - (i) The figures of the Census Commissioner, of Mr. Blunt and of the Government in 1928 all agree that the depressed class population meaning thereby those who cause pollution by touch is approximately between 11 1/2 and 13 millions. It is therefore for the Committee to justify its surprisingly low estimate.
  - (ii) I am not at all certain that when the Committee says that the two depressed class members agree in its view and the majority of the Committee were ad-idem in respect of all the implications of the agreement. At any rate, I am bound to point out that the opinion of Babu Ram Charan on this issue has no value. He belongs to the depressed class in the sense of the economically poor and educationally backward classes and not to the untouchable classes in the strict sense of the term.
  - (iii) The Indian Franchise Committee has adopted two tests for the classification of untouchables, temple entry and pollution by touch. The U. P. Provincial Franchise Committee has proceeded on the basis of only one test namely causing pollution by touch and that too in its literal sense and not in its notional sense.
  - (iv) In adopting our Chairman's definition of untouchability, which I must say he gave on his own responsibility, the Provincial Franchise Committee does not seem to have adverted to the clause " as it exists in the United Provinces".
10. There is another question of great importance which arises in connection with the method adopted both by Mr. Blunt and the U. P. Government in estimating the population of the depressed classes. The Indian Franchise Committee has proceeded on the hypothesis that all those who fall under the two tests accepted by it must be treated as untouchables and must be reckoned as such for purposes of special



representation. In the course of its investigation the Indian Franchise Committee found that as things stood in India, all depressed classes were not untouchables, and to include all untouchables irrespective of their economic and educational condition. Mr. Blunt and the Government of the United Provinces seem to make a distinction between " untouchables " and " depressed classes " out of quite a different sort. According to them all depressed classes are untouchables. All untouchables, however, do not belong to the category of depressed classes. This is just the reverse of the prevalent practice and the conclusions of the Indian Franchise Committee. The question is not one of mere nomenclature. It has far reaching consequences which go to affect the degree of representation. The United Provinces Government and Mr. Blunt do not take into their calculation all untouchables for the purposes of representation. They take into account only those untouchables who can be called depressed. The Indian Franchise Committee proceeds on the hypothesis that once the class of untouchables is ascertained by the application of the two tests it has accepted for the purpose the whole of the class of untouchables so ascertained must be taken into account for the purpose of representation without any further distinction between rich and poor, advanced and backward, educated and uneducated, which in my opinion is the correct procedure.

It is hardly necessary for me to say that I do not agree with the procedure adopted by Mr. Blunt and the Government of the United Provinces.

### **III. Depressed Classes in the Punjab**

11. In connection with the population figure for the depressed classes given in the census of 1931 I wish to draw attention to two facts :
  - (1) The population of those who caused pollution by touch was according to the census of 1911, 2.8 millions while in the census of 1931 the population of untouchables is given as amounting to 1.3 millions.
  - (2) The census of 1911 gives a list of 23 castes which are deemed to cause pollution by touch. The census of 1931 mentions only castes as forming the untouchable population in the Punjab. Why the total population of the untouchables and the list of castes included in that category should have shrunk so much between 1911 and 1931 I am not able to ascertain. It is however necessary to state that among the untouchables of Punjab there has been going on for some years past a strong movement called the Ad-

Dharm movement the object of which is to separate from the Hindu fold and form themselves into a distinct community under the new name of Ad-Dharmis. Such has been the strength of the movement that the untouchables decided to return themselves as Ad-Dharmis instead of Hindus in the census of 1931, and the Government gave recognition to this feeling and allowed the Census Superintendent of Punjab to open a new category of Ad-Dharmis. This led in some parts of the Punjab to riots between the Hindus and the untouchables. As a result the untouchables in some parts returned themselves simply as Ad-Dharmis without mentioning their respective castes, and in other parts where they were prevented from doing so returned themselves as Hindus under their caste names. I am mentioning these facts to show that the difficulties created in the enumeration of the untouchables and which are admitted by the Government of Punjab may be responsible for this shrinkage in the number and list of untouchables in the Punjab. The matter therefore requires to be carefully looked into.

#### **IV. Depressed Classes in Bengal**

13. In regard to the depressed classes of Bengal there is an important piece of evidence to which I should like to call attention and which goes to show that the list given in the Bengal Census of 1911 is a correct enumeration of caste which have been traditionally treated as untouchable castes in Bengal. I refer to Section 7 of Regulation IV of 1809 (A regulation for rescinding Regulations IV and V of 1806 ; and for substituting rules in lieu of those enacted in the said regulations for levying duties from the pilgrims resorting to Jagannath, and for the superintendence and management of the affairs of the temple; passed by the Governor-General in Council, on the 28th of April 1809) which gives the following list of castes which were debarred from entering the temple of Jagannath at Puri : (1) Loli or Kashi, (2) Kalal or Sunri, (3) Machhua, (4) Namasudra or Chandal, (5) Ghuski, (6) Gazur, (7) Bagdi, (8) Jogi or Nurbaf, (9) Kahar-Bauri and Dulia, (10) Rajbansi, (11) Pirali, (12) Chamar, (13) Dom, (14) Pan, (15) Tiyar, (16) Bhuinnali, and (17) Hari.

The enumeration agrees with the list of 1911 Census and thus lends support to its correctness. Incidentally it shows that a period of 100 years made no change in the social status of the untouchables of Bengal.

- II. In connection with the three provinces, United Provinces, Bengal and

Punjab, where there is disagreement on the question of the population of the Depressed Classes I desire to draw attention to the fact that the Indian Franchise Committee has proceeded upon two distinct tests for the ascertainment of the untouchable population, while the Provincial Governments and Provincial Committees have apparently followed one single test, namely, causing pollution by touch.

#### **V. Nomenclature**

14. The revision of the electoral rolls consequent upon the proposed changes in the constitution is a very good occasion for considering the question of having a proper and appropriate nomenclature for the depressed classes. I therefore propose to express my opinion on this question. There is considerable objection on the part of the communities which are now called "depressed classes" to the use of that term in describing them. Several witnesses who have appeared before the Committee have given expression to this sentiment. Besides the term 'depressed classes' has led to a great deal of confusion in the census because it includes others who are not strictly untouchables. Secondly, it gives the impression that the depressed classes are a low and helpless community when as a matter of fact in every Province numbers of them are both well-to-do and well-educated, and the whole community is acquiring consciousness of its needs, is charged with ambition for securing a respectable status in Indian society and is making stupendous efforts to achieve it. On all these grounds the term 'depressed classes' is inappropriate and unsuitable. Mr. Mullan, the Census Superintendent of Assam, has brought into use a new term called 'exterior castes' to cover the untouchables. This designation has many advantages. It defines exactly the position of the untouchables who are within the Hindu religion but outside the Hindu society and distinguishes it from Hindus who are economically and educationally depressed but who are both within the pale of Hindu religion and Hindu society. The term has two other advantages. It avoids all the confusion that is now caused by use of the vague term depressed classes and at the same time is not offensive. Our Committee did not feel competent to make recommendation in this behalf. But as a representative of the depressed classes I have no hesitation in saying that until better nomenclature is found the untouchable classes should hereafter be described by the more expressive term 'Exterior Castes' or 'Excluded Castes' and not as depressed classes.

## **VI. Reservations**

15. Before concluding this note I would like on my part to make the same reservation which my Muslim colleagues on the Committee have made namely that the allocation of seats to labour women, and other special interests must not affect the proportion of seats which the depressed classes have claimed in the Minorities Pact submitted to the Round Table Conference.

The 1st May 1932.

B. R. AMBEDKAR

[Contents](#)